

УДК 94 (47)

## V.M. Chernov on “Stalin’s Modernization”

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Received 02.07.2014, received in revised form 29.07.2014, accepted 15.09.2014

*The article is based on the analysis of the materials from domestic and foreign archives. It considers the views of V.M. Chernov, an outstanding figure in the world and Russian socialist movement, the leader of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, an ideologist of neo-populism on modernization of the country during “Stalin’s socialism” era.*

*Keywords: V.M. Chernov, socialist-Revolutionary Party, political emigration, the USSR, modernization, industrialization, collectivization, totalitarianism.*

*Research area: History.*

### Introduction

The strategic problems of modernization, which are on modern Russia’s agenda, urgently require the comprehension of the Soviet practice of the country’s cardinal breakthrough to new technologies. The assessment of this process from alternative Bolshevism ideological and methodological positions is of a special current interest. V.M. Chernov, a prominent figure in the world and Russian socialist movement, the leader of the Socialist-Revolutionary party, a neo-populism ideologist, analyzed a specific character of the USSR’s development in his works of the 1920-1940-s while outside the country in his compelled political emigration.

### Statement of the problem

Victor Mikhailovich regarded the Bolshevik option of the country’s modernization from the democratic positions. Thus, at times ideological

prejudgment and rejection of Stalinist methods of modernization penetrated his estimates (Konovalova 2008, Konovalova 2009). However, detecting the reasons and features of this process, V.M. Chernov first of all proved to be a thoughtful researcher and, therefore, managed to reveal a number of important historical, civilization bases and regularities of the modernization process of Russia.

### Discussion

The socialist-revolutionaries’ leader indissolubly associated Stalin’s breakthrough to a bright future with the country’s historical past, its cultural and political traditions. In his opinion “militaristic methods” of modernization are caused by historical features of the country’s development. On the one hand, they are determined by “secular autocracy domination” and the complex of “spiritual Caesarism”,

engraved on the psychology of power and the people (Chernov 1924). Neither the destruction of the old state machinery, nor the overthrow of autocracy and exploiter classes could overcome them. It turned out to be much easier to overthrow the external autocracy rather than the people's internal, psychological that penetrated into their soul due to the force of a historical custom. It is considered to be interesting that Chernov came to the conclusion that the Bolsheviks' managerial methods corresponded to the type of the people's political consciousness and political culture in the late 1920-s. In 1927 in "Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia" ("Revolutionary Russia") he wrote: "An orgy of punishments by a guillotine or a KGB cellar, given a special governmental status and despiritualized by bureaucracy, will not make it possible to forget another orgy – an orgy of mass lynch laws ..., which were, unfortunately, in people's hands. Bolshevism only "concentrated a certain aspect of the revolution's ochlocratic tendency" (Chernov 1927).

The socialist-revolutionaries' leader emphasized that the country had already had a precedent of a historical breakthrough at the expense of internal resources and people's basic needs. It was achieved during the formation of the Russian Empire by means of the "police-run state". The Bolsheviks relied on the people's age-old habit to slavery and decided to drive it in socialism by "Peter the Great's bludgeon" (Konovalova 2009, 230). Chernov saw "a certain mix of Napoleonism, Petrograndism and Nietzscheanism" in carrying out industrialization at any cost, at the people's expense. According to the socialist-revolutionary, the Bolsheviks' credo was "not production for the people, but the people for production" (Ibid., 202). In his opinion, there was a substitution of purpose and means of the policy in the communists' consciousness. The country's industrialization turned from a means to achieve an individual's

and the society's wellbeing into an end in itself, and an individual turned into a means to achieve this purpose.

The neo-populist truly noticed a secret of such a metamorphosis in the influence of the events of World War I on public consciousness. Chernov claimed that though the Bolsheviks were antagonistic to the war in Zimmerwald, they didn't mean it to be a means of fight, but its bourgeois class shell. They were against the war not from the pacifistic positions – for the sake of peace. They wished an imperialistic war to become a civil one. In this case the October Revolution, according to Chernov, was "a lawful child of war", and moreover, its direct continuation and transferring from external borders to up-country. The Bolsheviks introduced "all the methods of war" and military ways of managing the society into the practice of political and economic life (Ibid., 229). Militarization of a political life resulted in the formation of a system of dictatorship, undivided authority. In 1928 in his article "On the issue of dictatorship and democracy" the socialist-revolutionary noted that similarly to a prerogative of the commander in the war, the power acquired the right to dispose of the people's lives and deaths, it made "a citizen a cannon fodder"; "the Order and Subordination" but not rights and freedoms became a priority (Chernov 1928, 9).

On the economic plane the concentration of all resources in hands of the "State, the Owner" and directive planning, that is imposing of a plan on the national economy by the central power's orders that inevitably resulted in the mass consumer's exploitation and, finally, in the aspiration for external might, were the signs of borrowing of militaristic methods and their introduction to a peaceful life. The population in a militaristic society is obliged to sacrifice everything with no regard to their urgent needs.

At the same time the socialist-revolutionary recognized that modernization tasks were dictated by a historical need to overcome the country's backwardness and connected with the failure of S.Yu. Witte's policy. The first variant of capitalist modernization was insolvent for two main reasons. The world economic crisis of the early 1900-s contributed to the capital outflow from Russia, and the peasants' bankruptcy and unresolved agrarian issue prevented the use of internal reserves. The political elite of the Russian Empire was unable to offer the ways of solving the contradictions of the modernization process. This led to the crash of the empire during World War I. As Chernov concluded, the imperial regime didn't pass the "examination of the world military catastrophe".

In the 1930-s the socialist-revolutionary stated that, having got the power, the Communist party "abolished capitalism by the decree" but had to continue what the imperial elite didn't finish. And it stands to reason that industrialization became "a soul of the Soviet economic policy". The Soviet power had to undertake "the menial work of bourgeoisie, the failure". However, the Soviet state didn't have outer colonies as sources of accumulation used by the West European bourgeoisie in their time. During the NEP (New Economic Policy) period the Bolsheviks didn't manage to attract foreign capital the way it was done by S.Yu. Witte. Despite the official recognition of the Soviet power Europe didn't trust the Bolsheviks who refused to pay the debts of the tsarist and Provisional Government and pursued the policy of destabilization of the situation in Europe within the doctrine of Comintern (Communist International). Besides, there were no spare capitals in Europe. Europe itself needed investments; "healing its wounds" after the World War, it asked for the USA's help; and as for the Bolsheviks' relations with "the world creditor", they were very intense. Therefore they had to

find some internal sources instead of using the external economic resources. In these conditions, according to the socialist-revolutionary, the Russian peasantry was compelled to play a role of an "internal colony" (Konovalova 2008, 138-139).

Thus, Chernov stated, Stalinist collectivization is subordinated to the industrialization policy. To implement it successfully the government started a forced proletarianization of the village, having practically declared a war to "the peasants' independent farming" (Ibid., 193). In response to the government's actions the peasantry started a "small war". The initial forms of this war were peaceful. They slaughtered the cattle, caused stock damage, and aimlessly left the villages. Then the war started the methods of spontaneous guerrilla war (Chernov 1930, 1-3). Despite all the OGPU diligences, the socialist-revolutionary emigration learnt about the peasants' mass struggles during collectivization. In his letter dated February 1, 1932 to the members of the USA socialist-revolutionary organization Chernov reported that the Bolshevik authorities were compelled to undertake "a furious mobilization of the communist front-ranks, similar to the Kronstadt rebellion" not to lose their control over the situation in the village.

In these conditions the socialist-revolutionaries' leader expected the government, frightened by the scale of the peasants' discontent, to make concessions. Exactly in such a focus he analyzed a well-known Stalin's article devoted to the criticism of the "excesses on places". However, he didn't consider the government's concessions to be fundamental ones. He believed that they couldn't affect the nature of collectivization seriously as the process was of an irreversible character. "Stalin is not the lord of the general flow of things any more. ... He evoked the spirits, and he is not a person to conjure them", Chernov

wrote. "The colossus of state industrialization on clay feet of the peasants' independent agriculture, killed alive, obeys its own law of gravitation, coupling and disintegration", noted Victor Mikhailovich with bitterness (Konovalova 2009, 194).

Thus, by the end of the 1930-s Chernov was compelled to admit that the Bolsheviks had no other alternative except industrialization at the expense of the peasantry. It was historically and politically predetermined. At the same time he considered forms and methods of industrialization essentially wrong not only morally but also from the point of economic feasibility. Put into practice at the expense of limiting the population's consumption and backwardness of branches of light industry and agriculture, such modernization of the country did not only aggravate social contradictions in the country but also caused an essential decrease in the people's general cultural and economic level. Dragging the present generation to "economic Golgotha" for the future, the Bolsheviks broke the law of continuous development of human needs which motivate a human's vigorous creative activity. He predicted that "light freezing" of elementary needs would lead to the most harmful consequences in the future. Chernov considered gradual, voluntary cooperation of the peasantry to be an alternative to total collectivization. It was better to act according to Lenin's conception in this process – "better less but of a higher quality". He thought it to be better to collectivize a small part of the peasants' farms as it could be supplied with better seeds and equipment. In this case collective farms would become economically profitable; they wouldn't be credited at the expense of the state and turn to be "convincing instead of being a scarecrow" for the peasants.

Recognizing correctness of the country's industrialization course as a direction of the economic policy, Chernov objected to the ways

and means of its implementation, proposed by the Bolsheviks. He thought that concentration of all resources in heavy industry would inevitably lead to the disproportion in economy – to an "ugly hegemony ... of heavy industry over light industry, to self-sufficing manufacture of the production means over that of consumption means". It would cause such a feature of the Soviet economy as "hypertrophy of mechanical engineering" which he qualified as "the abnormality, directly hurting the eyes" or "elephantiasis" of Soviet economy" (Chernov 1942, 41).

Reflecting on the results of the first five-year plans, Chernov paid attention to the inconsistent results of Stalin's industrialization. On the one hand, these were "production giants which were as if from the other world, couldn't become a part of the country's overall economy and required absolutely different living and cultural conditions". On the other hand, these were exhaustion, impoverishment and starvation of the masses, lack of trained workers and engineers, uninterrupted supply with all necessary things for manufacture. The built industrial giants weren't used to the full. If left unfinished they drag out "inactive existence", being partially or even entirely "on preservation", in hope to be used in distant future. The socialist-revolutionary noted that at the same time "a rapid growth of modern technology turns the equipment ... into a quickly outdated one". Therefore "in many cases the intensive construction, for which there is the lack of all necessary conditions, turns to be a fruitless, anti-economic squandering of national resources".

"We could hope, – he argued, – that this feature of the Soviet industry (hypertrophy of mechanical engineering, industrial gigantism – O. Konovalova) is simply explained by the need to make up for depreciation of the equipment of Russian factories in the course of World War I and the civil war". However, Chernov fairly pointed

out and even foresaw, if we could say so, that when the issue of overcoming the backwardness was mainly resolved in the USSR, the normal ratio between light and heavy industries wasn't established still.

On the one hand, the reasons for such phenomenon were considered to be in the specificity of the Soviet model of social development. The model presupposed concentration of all forces and resources in the hands of the state. In 1947 dwelling upon the phenomenon of Soviet modernization in his article "Objectives of a five-year plan and objectives of the century", published in the socialist-revolutionary magazine "Za svobodu" ("For Freedom"), Chernov admitted that concentration of all power and resources in the hands of the state undoubtedly promoted a grandiose increase of all economic parameters, emergence of unlimited investment opportunities. However, the reverse side of the "medal" was the loss of value of the production's direct profitability, alienation of the production from the population's needs, and, consequently, hypertrophy of mechanical engineering and industrial gigantism (Chernov 1947).

Focusing on the model of social development, the frame of which made it possible for the Bolsheviks to step onto an industrial stage of the society's development, Chernov came to the conclusion that there is no more capitalism in Russia already but there is no socialism yet as well. Unlike a capitalist state the Soviet state plays a key role in all spheres of public life, monopolizing power, property, and resources in its hands, determining prices, salaries, and dictating ideological and cultural priorities. Therefore, according to Chernov, "the Soviet economic regime differs from other ones by its own method of making use of surplus labor, surplus produce and surplus value" (Chernov 1942a, 12-13).

However, in this regard it is certainly not a socialist one as exploitation and property, which

is neither private nor class but a state one, are preserved, a producer's "diktat" over a consumer is carried out, individual rights and freedoms are limited, dictatorial and repressive methods of control are widely used (Konovalova 2007). But socialism without democracy and freedom is inconceivable for a socialist-revolutionary theorist. In 1930 he wrote: "Democracy is nothing more than a political side of socialism". (See more: Konovalova 2001; Konovalova 2005; Konovalova 2006).

During the controversy on the point of historical processes in the USSR on pages of the emigrant editions Chernov wrote his article "K poznaniu sovetskoi ekonomiki" ("To the knowledge of the Soviet economy") in 1942. Basing on R. Hilferding's ideas, he noted: "The Soviet system is neither a capitalist stage nor a socialist one, nor a transitional one which is considered to be mixed economy. It is something different – state capitalism – or etatism ... with its own laws of internal balance and own tendency of the development into a more mature, typical and complete form". He qualified it as "totalitarian economic etatism" with "a totalitarian one-party state" as a special political form, corresponding to it" (Konovalova 2008).

The leader of the socialist-revolutionaries came to a conclusion that in the XX century a new qualitative stage emerges between a stage of "organizational, adjustable" imperialistic capitalism and socialism. It is "hyper-imperialism" which is considered to be state capitalism or etatism. Its distinctive features are strengthening of the role of state in public life, merging of financial oligarchy with the government, aggravation of contradictions between industrially developed and raw-material producing countries. Etatism gets special totalitarian forms in the countries where capitalism is introduced rather late and the processes of initial accumulation and industrialization are incomplete. The government

self-forgetfully surrenders itself to forcing the production; abnormal production "gigantism" and hypertrophy of heavy industry at the expense of light industry prosper everywhere; "manufacture of means of production" moves into the first place. This leads to the growth of military industry in the depths of heavy industry and furthers the aggravation of the international situation (Chernov 1942b, 37-38).

It turns out that Chernov traced an inextricable connection between totalitarian tendencies of the development of the society and the state and the process of modernization of the country. Practically it was found out that Russia managed to carry out strategic objectives of the country's industrialization, the country had been facing since the end of the XIX century, only within the frame of a totalitarian form.

The socialist-revolutionary linked the conditionality of this form of industrialization not only with the historical features of Russia's development, but also with the strategic objectives of the Soviet foreign policy. Considering the USSR to be the main culprit in unleashing "the cold war", he emphasized that equipping the armed forces of the USSR with the latest enginery to maintain the strength and power of the state hadn't lost its relevance even after the end of World War II (Chernov 1947). It must be kept in mind that the opposition between the USA and the USSR during the years of "the cold war" was regarded by Chernov as not the fight of national and geopolitical interests but a global confrontation of democracy and totalitarianism. Idealizing the American democracy, he blamed the USSR for unleashing the "third" world war. On the one hand, such assessment was Chernov's peculiar reduction of the Bolsheviks' attitude towards global political processes during the civil war; on the other hand, the socialist-revolutionaries' leader obviously viewed this situation by "the U.S.A. citizen's eyes".

## Conclusion

However, ideological bias didn't prevent Chernov from defining fundamental features and nature of Stalinist modernization. He correctly connected them not only with the historical specificity but also with the geopolitical position of Russia. Existing in "hostile" environment, practically in the centre of the world, in Eurasia, having considerable land borders, Russia was compelled to support and develop its military potential and army in an actual state to maintain its political independence and civilization bases. This, in its turn, determined the "militaristic spirit" of its modernization process and proved the leading role of the state.

Despite his critical position towards Stalinist modernization, integrally negative assessment of the socialist construction experience in the USSR, Chernov didn't support the sentiments which were widespread in the circles of the Russian emigrates and expressed in the "back to capitalism" slogan (Proekt... 1930, 7). The position of a number of prominent figures among the socialist revolutionaries, grouping around the journal "Sovremennye zapiski" ("Modern Notes") and A.F. Kerensky's newspaper "Dni" ("Days"), was the same. He called to be "very careful and cautious" towards the Soviet system's socio-economic heritage. If democratic forces come to power in Russia, then, he urged, it is advisable to preserve "economically cost-effective and socially beneficial institutions and enterprises of cooperative and public sectors, proved to be viable and effective" (Konovalova 2009, 196). He believed that despite huge costs of the Bolshevik policy there is a constructive and important social principle for the people in them. Besides, the Bolsheviks succeeded in making a maximum use of the people's faith in a brighter future in the course of modernization.

In our opinion the analysis of V.M. Chernov's positions, concerning Stalinist modernization in

the USSR, allows to define fundamental reference points for modern Russian policy. These are the following ones:

- setting a priority objective – development of spiritual-and-cultural and social-and-economic potential of an individual and the society;
- need for taking cultural-and-civilization and historical bases and forms of modernization process into account;
- a leading role of the state in determination of strategic directions and organization of financing of modernization projects;
- an optimum correlation between the interests of external safety and internal stability, prosperity of the society and the state;
- combination of state and private initiative, administrative resource and creative potential of society, groups and individuals on the "golden mean" principle;
- balance between administrative and democratic methods of regulation of modernization process;
- integrated systemic approach to reforming of industries, agriculture and service industry;
- harmonization of the producers' and consumers' interests.

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## **В.М. Чернов о модернизации Сталина**

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*Статья основана на анализе материалов из внутренних и внешних архивов. Рассмотрены взгляды В.М. Чернова – известного представителя мирового и российского социалистического движения, лидера социалистических революционеров, идеолога неопопулизма на модернизации страны в течение эры социализма Сталина.*

*Ключевые слова: В.М. Чернов, партия социалистов-революционеров, политическая эмиграция, СССР, модернизация, индустриализация, коллективизация, тоталитаризм.*

*Научная специальность: 07.00.00 – исторические науки.*

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